

Message Text

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SUBJECT: EDITORIAL IN IRISH TIMES, AUGUST 1, 1977

MONDAY'S IRISH TIMES CARRIED HALF PAGE COVERAGE OF LIBRARY
OF CONGRESS REPORT THE PROTESTANT IRISH, SEN. EDWARD
KENNEDY'S INTRODUCTORY REMARKS, AND AN EDITORIAL "DISCOVERY"
WHICH FOLLOWS:

"SENATOR TED KENNEDY HAS DISCOVERED THE PROTESTANT IRISH.

GOOD FOR HIM.

HE HAS DISCOVERED THEM PARTICULARLY IN THEIR CONTRIBUTION
TO THE MAKING OF THE UNITED STATES, AND BEING A GOOD,
EXTROVERT, HARD-SLOGGING POLITICIAN HE HAS DECIDED TO
PROJECT HIS ENTHUSIASM.

HE COMMISSIONED THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS TO CONDUCT A STUDY
ON THE PROTESTANT IRISH HERITAGE OF AMERICA, AND HE
HAS NOW LAUNCHED IT WITH A WARM APPEAL FOR ITS
ACCEPTANCE.

IN HIS STATEMENT HE POINTS OUT BOLDLY THAT HIS LATE
BROTHER JOHN F. KENNEDY WAS BY NO MEANS THE FIRST
IRISH PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES BUT THE "FIRST
IRISH CATHOLIC PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES" (NOT
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IRISH AMERICAN, BE IT NOTED.)

"FEW ARE AWARE," THE STATEMENT RUNS, "THAT ONE OF
OUR MOST FAMOUS PRESIDENTS, ANDREW JACKSON, WAS AN
IRISH PROTESTANT PRESIDENT, OR THAT TWELVE OTHER
PRESIDENTS ALSO SHARE THAT PROTESTANT IRISH HERITAGE."

THE KENNEDYS, FOR SOME DECADES, HAVE BEEN PROBABLY THE MOST FAMOUS POLITICAL FAMILY IN THE WORLD - NOT EXCLUDING ROYALTY. NO ONE CAN BELIEVE THAT THIS ASPECT OF IRISH AMERICAN HISTORY SUDDENLY DAWNED ON, OR HAS JUST BEEN REVEALED TO, TED KENNEDY. THE DIFFERENCE IS THAT NOW IT IS POLITIC TO TALK ABOUT IT.

IRISH PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN CONSCIOUS OF IT ALL ALONG NEED NOT BE TOO CENSORIOUS OR CYNICAL AT THIS SUDDEN, NAIF-APPEARING CONVERSION. FOR IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT THE SENATOR'S DEMARCHE IS ONE PART OF AN AMERICAN CAMPAIGN BEING BUILT UP IN THE ENTIRELY LAUDABLE HOPE OF BRINGING NOT MERELY PEACE BUT SOME MEASURE OF MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING AMONG THE PEOPLE OF THE NORTH.

HE DESERVES WELL FOR HIS WILLINGNESS TO TAKE UP THE CAUSE.

HOW THIS CAMPAIGN WILL BE RECEIVED BY THE IRISH AMERICANS, IS ONE QUESTION, AND IT WILL BE INTERESTING TO SEE IF KENNEDY'S APPEAL WILL ENSURE WIDESPREAD COVERAGE BY THE MEDIA.

THE NORTHERN PROTESTANT EMIGRANTS, IT SEEMS, HAVE OFTEN BEEN LUMPED BY IRISH AMERICANS ALONG WITH THE WHITE ANGLO-SAXONS OR WASPS: A MISREADING OF THEIR STATUS.
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FOR WHILE THESE 18TH-CENTURY EMIGRANTS WERE SELDOM IN SUCH DIRE STRAITS AS THE HORDES WHO FLED FROM THE FAMINE COUNTRY OF THE 1840'S AND LATER, THEY SHIFTED OFTEN ENOUGH BECAUSE OF CROP FAILURES, OF HARSH IMPOSITION FROM LANDLORDS AND ESTABLISHED CHURCH HARASSMENT OVER TITHES. THEY WERE, IN TODAY'S TERMS, ALSO THE UNDERPRIVILEGED.

A SECOND QUESTION IS HOW THE KENNEDY CAMPAIGN WILL BE RECEIVED BY NORTHERN PROTESTANTS IN GENERAL AND UNIONIST POLITICIANS IN PARTICULAR.

FOR LONG, STORMONT KEPT UP A BARRAGE OF PROPAGANDA ABOUT THE NORTH'S FAMOUS PRESIDENTS. IT DIDN'T SEEM TO HELP MUCH. TERENCE O'NEILL WAS A GREAT CAMPAIGNER FOR A JOB-LOT WHOM HE CALLED THE SCOTS-IRISH AND ONCE ACTUALLY GOT IN TO SEE LYNDON JOHNSON. THE UNIONIST ESTABLISHMENT WILL DRAW SOME GRIM SATISFACTION FROM THE SENATOR'S LATE CONVERSION.

THERE IS A DANGER THAT SENATOR KENNEDY'S ENTHUSIASM FOR THE PROTESTANT NORTHERNERS MAY EXALT THE IDEA

OF TWO CULTURES. THERE IS MORE TO BEING IRISH THAN
CLAIMING EITHER SAXON OR CELTIC ORIGINS. THE PEOPLE
OF THIS ISLAND DERIVE NOT ONLY CUSTOMS AND ATTITUDES
BUT ALSO GENES FROM INHABITANTS WHO HAD BEEN MILLENNIA
ON THE LAND BEFORE EVEN THE CELTS CAME, MUCH LESS THE
ENGLISH.

WE ARE, AS AE HAD IT, ONE RIVER BORN OF MANY STREAMS,
AND THE PROTESTANT IRISH OF THE NORTH HAVE AS MUCH A
CLAIM ON ALL OF THIS IRISH HERITAGE AS ANYONE ELSE."
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